STATE OF THE COMMUTE

1999 State of the Commute Report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
ASSOCIATION of GOVERNMENTS
Southern California Rideshare

1999 State of the Commute Report

Southern California Association of Governments
Southern California Rideshare
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The contents of this report reflect the views of the authors who are responsible for the facts and accuracy of the data reflected herein.

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July, 2000

Southern California Association of Governments Mission Statement

Leadership
Vision
Progress

Leadership, vision and ***progress*** which promote economic growth, personal well-being, and livable communities for all Southern Californians.

The Association will accomplish this Mission by:

- ▲ Developing long-range regional plans and strategies that provide for efficient movement of people, goods and information; enhance economic growth and international trade; and improve the environment and quality of life.
- ▲ Providing quality information services and analysis for the region.
- ▲ Using an inclusive decision-making process that resolves conflicts and encourages trust.
- ▲ Creating an educational and work environment that cultivates creativity, initiative, and opportunity.

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Rev. 6/8/00

Southern California Rideshare Mission Statement

The mission of Southern California Rideshare is to connect people with alternative transportation choices to driving alone through a partnership of government, business and individuals.

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1999 STATE OF THE COMMUTE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Traffic congestion is one of Southern California's greatest challenges. Each day, Southern Californians waste nearly 1.8 million vehicle hours in congested traffic. Traffic congestion also contributes to air pollution, causes wasteful consumption of energy, and results in tremendous loss in productivity. As local and state transportation agencies seek to identify solutions to Southern California's transportation problems, it is important to understand how commuters get to and from work, how they perceive their commute, and what factors influence their commute decisions.

Toward this goal, nine annual State of the Commute Surveys have been conducted to study commute attitudes and behaviors in the Southern California region over the last eleven years (This study was not conducted in 1995 and 1997 due to lack of funding).

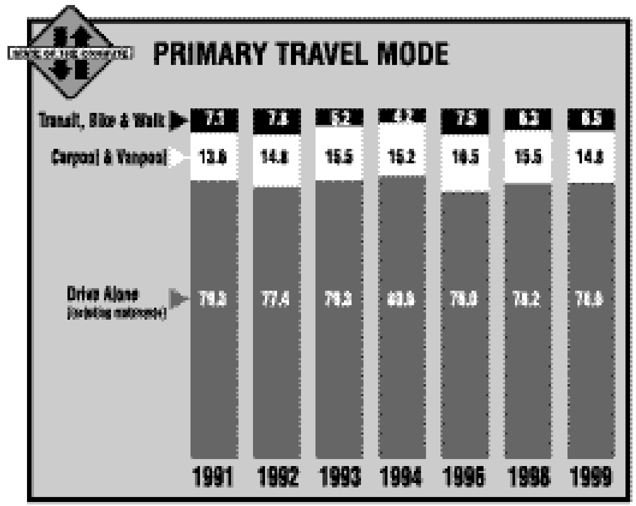
The 1999 State of the Commute Survey is based on a telephone survey of commuters in Southern California. The survey collects updated information on commuters' travel behavior and attitudes about traffic congestion, alternative travel options, employer-provided transportation information and services and high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes.

Historically, the study has been a useful tool for transportation planners, operators, and public officials in their efforts to shape the region's transportation policy, infrastructure and legislation. The study also is used by businesses in the development of rideshare promotional activities. The following is a summary of the 1999 State of the Commute findings.

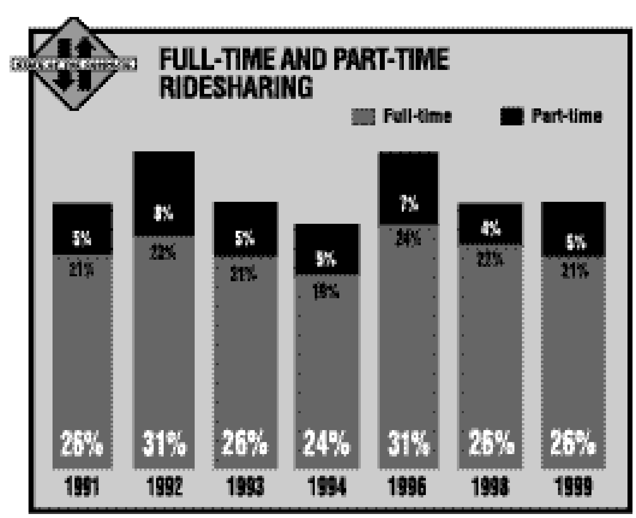
TRAVEL BEHAVIOR AND TRENDS

- **PRIMARY TRAVEL MODE:** According to the 1999 survey, 78.5 percent of commuters drive alone, 0.1 percent ride motorcycle, 13.9 percent carpool, 0.9 percent vanpool, 4.7 percent ride the bus, 0.7 percent take rail, 0.5 percent bicycle, and 1.1 percent walk to work on a regular basis.

Compared to 1998 findings, the share of drive-alone and bus commuters increases slightly while the share of motorcycle, walk, carpool, and vanpool declines slightly. Usage of other travel modes is consistent with 1998 findings. In addition, the difference in the drive alone rate in 1999 compared to previous years is not statistically significant with the exception of 1996.

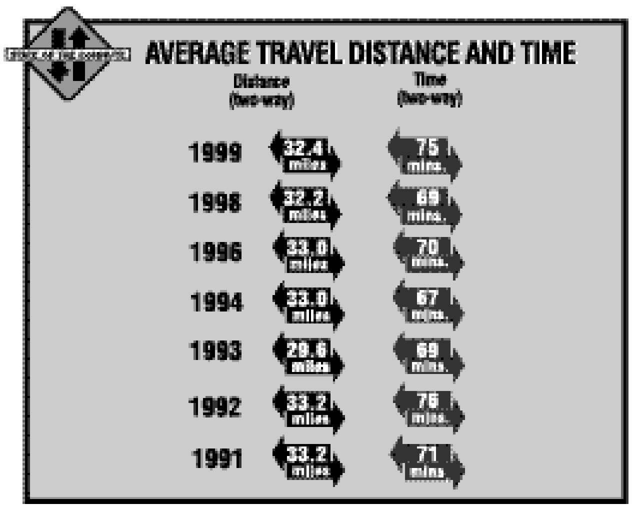


- **FULL-TIME AND PART-TIME RIDESHARING:** Twenty-six percent of commuters use alternatives to driving alone either full-time (three or more days a week) (21%) or part-time (one or two days a week) (5%). The percentage is the same as reported in 1998.



- **TRAVEL DISTANCE:** According to the 1999 survey, the average self-reported travel distance to work is 16.2 miles (one-way), virtually the same as reported in 1998 (16.1 miles).

- **TRAVEL TIME:** The average travel time to work is 34 minutes; the average travel time home 41 minutes. Both are higher than reported in 1998 (32 minutes and 37 minutes respectively).



- **ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE TIME:** Of commuters surveyed, 38 percent say they arrive at work before 7:30 a.m. and 51 percent leave work before 5:00 p.m. Consistent with findings from previous surveys, a significant percentage of commuters are now arriving at the work site before 6 a.m. (10%).

- **CARPOOLS/VANPOOLS:** Carpools consist of an average of 2.6 members. Consistent with the finding reported in 1998, carpooling with co-workers remains the second most common type of carpool formation (36%) after a steady decline from 47 percent in 1994. Carpoolers report having been in their current carpool about two and a half years (31 months) and travel an average distance of 17.2 miles to work.

  The average vanpool consists of 5.0 members. Vanpoolers report having been in their current vanpool an average of nearly four years (47 months) and travel an average distance of 17.1 miles to work.

- **BUS RIDERS:** Riders report they have been using bus service an average of about five and a half years (65 months). Respondents who do not currently ride the bus were asked whether there was a bus that they could take to get to work. Commuters who answered affirmatively constitute 38 percent of respondents. Bus riders commute an average distance of 11.6 miles.

- **STOPS DURING THE COMMUTE:** Twenty percent of all respondents mention that they make a stop on the way to work. Of these, 33 percent stop to take their child to day care or school and another 26 percent stop to eat. With regard to the trip home, 23 percent of commuters make stops. Of these, 28 percent stop to buy groceries or go shopping and another 28 percent stop to pick up their child from day care or school. More commuters make stops on the trip home than they do on their trip to work.

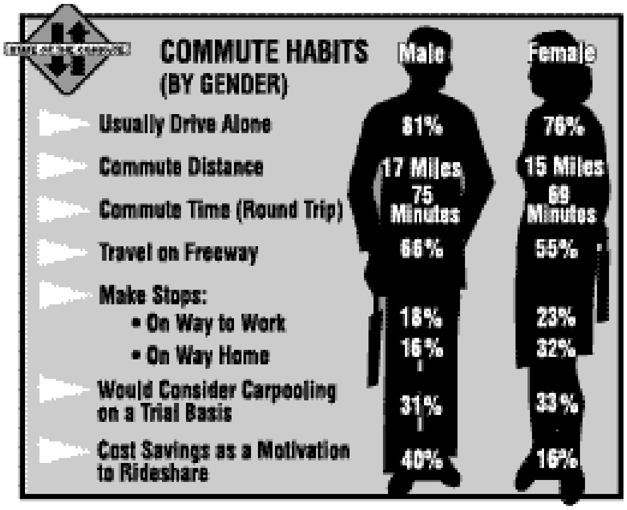
- **NEED FOR VEHICLE DURING THE WORK DAY:** Sixty-two percent of all respondents report they need their vehicle at work at least one day a week for either business or personal purposes. However, the average number of days a week these commuters need their vehicle at work is only 2.7. Thirty-eight percent of all respondents claim they don't need their vehicle at work at all for either business or personal reasons.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

- **GENDER:** Men are somewhat more likely than women to drive alone to work on a regular basis (81% vs. 76%) and are less likely to carpool to work on a regular basis (12% vs. 17%).

- **AGE:** In general, younger commuters are more likely to use alternatives to driving alone than older commuters (28% of those under 30 years of age compared to only 15% of those 50 years of age and older).

- **ETHNICITY:** Eighty-five percent of Whites and Asians drive alone to work on a regular basis compared to 69 percent of African-Americans and 70 percent of Hispanics.



- **INCOME:** The highest income group of commuters with an annual household income of $80,000 or more are the most likely to drive alone (84%) and the least likely to carpool (12%) to work; while the lowest income group of commuters with less than $35,000 are the least likely to drive alone (66%) and the most likely to carpool (17%) or take a public bus (10%) to work.

- **NUMBER OF MOTORIZED VEHICLES:** The question was not asked in the 1999 survey. According to the 1998 survey, respondents report an average of 2.5 motorized vehicles per household. Motorized vehicles include automobiles, trucks, vans and highway motorcycles owned or leased by members of the household.

- **AVAILABILITY OF A VEHICLE TO WORK:** Five percent of the respondents report never having a vehicle available for commuting purposes.

COMMUTER AWARENESS OF EMPLOYER- PROVIDED TRANSPORTATION INFORMATION AND SERVICES

Awareness of employer-provided transportation information and services to encourage use of alternative travel modes or work schedules is of particular interest to those who advocate the effectiveness of these programs in reducing peak period travel.

- **TELECOMMUTING:** Of those surveyed, 8.6 percent of the respondents say they have the opportunity to work at home instead of their regular place of work. Of those with the opportunity to work at home, 82 percent actually do. Telecommuters report working at home an average of 3.2 days per month. Commuters with an annual household income of $65,000 or more are more likely to have the opportunity to telecommute than their counterparts with a lower household income (14% vs. 6%).

- **ALTERNATIVE WORK SCHEDULES:** Of those surveyed, 47 percent of area commuters report that their employer offers flexible work hours; of these, 75 percent participate. In addition:

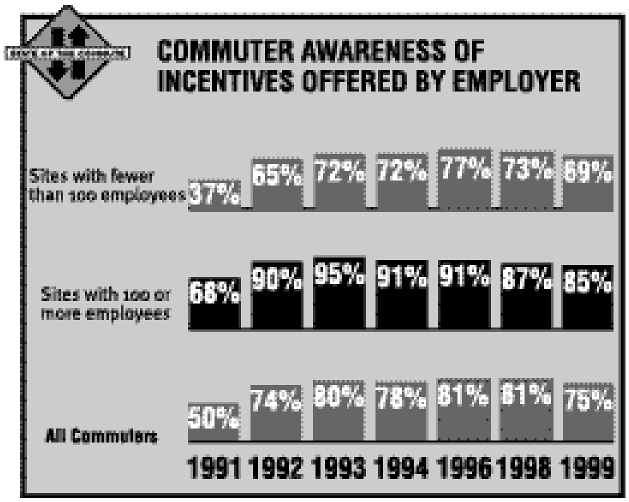
  - Eighteen percent say their employer offers a 4/40 work week (working four, 10-hour days and getting a day off every week); of these, 12 percent participate.

  - Nine percent report that their employer offers a 9/80 work week (working nine-hour days and getting a day off every other week); of these, 29 percent participate.

  - Five percent of area commuters say their employer offers a 3/36 work week (working 12-hour days and getting two days off a week); of these, 12 percent participate.

  - Five percent of all respondents say they are currently on either a 4/40, 9/80, or 3/36 work schedule.

- **AWARENESS OF EMPLOYER-PROVIDED TRANSPORTATION INFORMATION AND SERVICES:** Commuters are most likely to be aware of the following employer-provided transportation programs: flexible work hours (47%), a guaranteed ride home in the event of an emergency (34%), ridesharing information (31%), assistance in forming carpools/vanpools (27%), preferential parking (23%), 4/40 work schedule (18%), bus information on routes and schedules (14%), registration of employees with a rideshare agency (12%), free/low cost parking for ridesharing (11%), and contests/prizes for ridesharers (10%). However, the level of awareness continued to decline for the vast majority of employer transportation programs from 1998 to 1999 after a significant drop from 1996 to 1998. Employees at sites with 100 or more employees were much more likely to say that their employer offered at least one transportation program (85%) than those at sites with fewer than 100 employees (69%). Employees at currently regulated sites with 250 or more employees were most likely to say that their employers offered at least one transportation program (89%).



Commuters aware of employer-provided transportation information and services were asked whether they have used any of them. Participation rates are highest for the following transportation programs: telecommuting (82%), flexible work hours (75%), transportation allowances (46%), ridesharing subsidies (46%), use of a company car to run personal errands (44%), and registration with a rideshare agency (40%). Other programs with higher participation rates include: free or low-cost parking for ridesharers (39%), contests/prizes for ridesharers (39%), 9/80 work schedule (29%), ridesharing information (27%), preferential parking spaces to ridesharers (25%), and carpool/vanpool formation assistance (24%).

In general, of employees who have utilized transportation services offered by their employers, more than one in seven believes that it influenced their choice of travel mode. The most influential programs are: transportation allowance (32%), ridesharing subsidies (30%), free/low cost parking for ridesharers (21%), bus and rail information on routes and schedules (18%), contests/prizes for ridesharers (18%), guaranteed ride home (15%), carpool and vanpool formation assistance (15%), and ridesharing information (15%).

- **RECOGNITION OF THE 1-800-COMMUTE TELEPHONE NUMBER:** Of those surveyed, 33 percent are aware of the 1-800-COMMUTE telephone number and three percent have actually called the number for commute-related information. Recognition of 1-800-COMMUTE is significantly less than the recognition of a RIDE number (61%) reported in 1994. The 1-800-COMMUTE number was implemented in 1994.

  Of those who have contacted the 1-800-COMMUTE number, 39 percent were interested in receiving information on carpools/vanpools, followed by Metrolink (22%), bus/rail options (18%), freeway conditions (9%), and telecommuting (2%).

- **RECEIPT OF THE RIDEGUIDE:** Six percent of regional commuters report receiving a RideGuide during the past 12 months, same as reported in 1998 but significantly lower than the 10 percent reported in 1996. Predominantly, most of these commuters were interested in information on carpooling (76%), followed by bus (22%), vanpooling (13%), rail (11%), HOV lanes (4%), and park and ride lots (4%).

USE OF AND ATTITUDES TOWARD HOV LANES

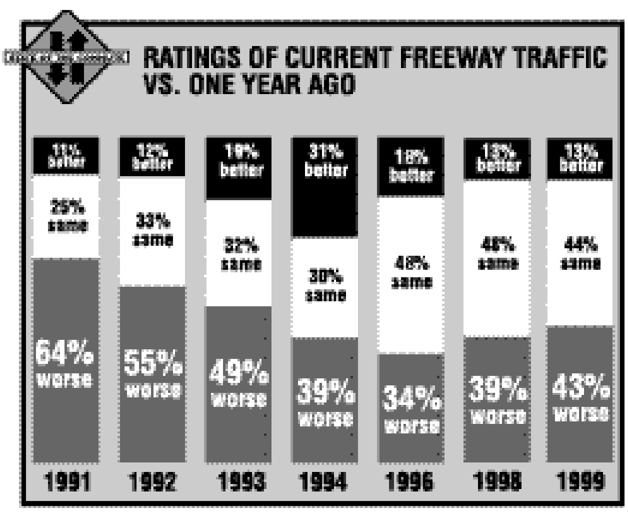
- **AVAILABILITY AND USE OF HOV LANES:** Nearly two-thirds of commuters use a freeway to travel to or from work (61%). Of these, 55 percent report having HOV lanes available to them. This continues a steady up trend since 1993 (37%). Of those having HOV lanes available to them, nearly one in five (18%) actually used the lanes at least once in the week prior to the survey. The vast majority of ridesharers with access to an HOV lane (71%) report traveling on the HOV lane to work.

◆ **ATTITUDES TOWARD HOV LANES:** Of the respondents with no HOV lanes available to them, 39 percent believe the availability of these HOV lanes would personally encourage them to carpool, vanpool, or take the bus.

ATTITUDES TOWARD TRAFFIC AND THE COMMUTE

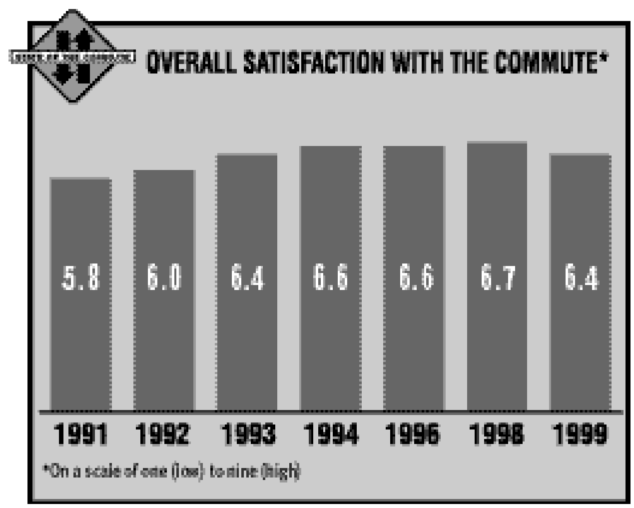
◆ **PERCEPTIONS OF TRAFFIC:** Survey respondents were asked to evaluate traffic during their commute, looking both at surface streets and freeways. Commuters consider freeway traffic worse than street traffic. Of those surveyed, 12 percent consider freeway traffic during their commutes to be always good, and 16 percent consider street traffic to be always good. This continues a steady decline since 1994 (26% and 37% respectively). Noticeably the gap between freeways and surface streets is narrowing.

Compared to 1998 findings, more commuters consider the current freeway (43% in 1999 vs. 39% in 1998) and surface traffic (33% vs. 30%) worse than one year ago. Accordingly, the share of commuters reporting that their commute is longer now than a year ago increased from 29 percent in 1998 to 33 percent in 1999.



◆ **CONSIDERATION OF ALTERNATIVE MODES:** When drive-alone commuters were asked what alternative travel modes they would consider using on a trial basis, 32 percent said they would consider carpooling, 28 percent would consider vanpooling, 18 percent would consider bicycling, 16 percent would consider walking or jogging, 16 percent would consider rail, and 13 percent would consider taking the bus.

◆ **SATISFACTION WITH THE COMMUTE:** On a scale of one (low) to nine (high), respondents give their commute an average rating of 6.4. This represents the first reversal of a steady up trend of satisfaction rating since 1990 (from 5.8 in 1990 to 6.7 in 1998). Over one-third of all commuters (36%) rate their satisfaction level as either an eight or nine, lower than the 42 percent reported in 1998. Six percent rate their level of satisfaction as either a one or two, higher than the four percent reported in 1998.



◆ **STRESSFULNESS OF THE COMMUTE:** More than one-quarter (29%) of all commuters report that they are fairly often or very often bothered by traffic congestion. The longer the trip, in terms of time and distance, the more bothered by traffic congestion and the more stressed commuters become.

◆ **COMMUTE-RELATED TRANSITIONS:** Nearly one in three respondents (31%) changed residence within the last two years. Of these, 17 percent cited commute-related reasons. Similarly, four in ten respondents (43%) changed jobs within the last two years; of these, 22 percent cited commute-related reasons.

◆ **COMMUTE COSTS:** Less than one-third (29%) of all respondents claimed to have previously calculated their commuting costs.

However, every respondent was asked to estimate their monthly commuting costs. For all commuters including those who had and had not previously estimated commuting costs, the perceived monthly cost of commuting on average is $92, lower than the $99 reported in 1998.

ESTIMATES OF MONTHLY COMMUTE COSTS BY PRIMARY MODE

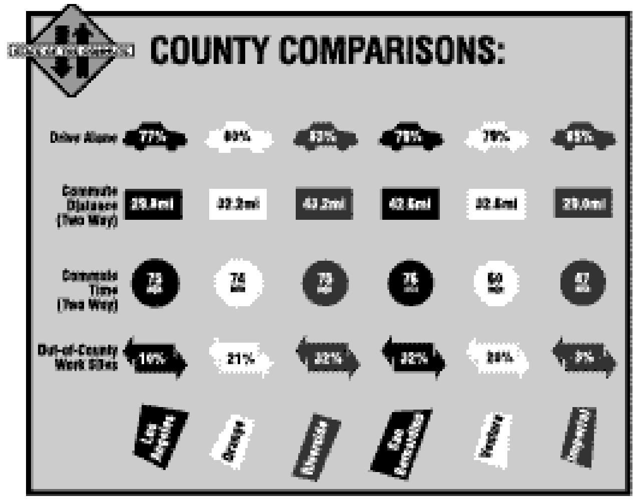
▲ Rail	$103
▲ Drive Alone	$97
▲ Carpool	$88
▲ Vanpool	$71
▲ Bus	$46
Average for all commuters	**$92**

COUNTY COMPARISONS

- Comparing the commute across county lines, the study shows Los Angeles County has the lowest drive alone rate, while Imperial County has the highest. Riverside and San Bernardino County residents are the most likely to cross county lines to get to work. Residents in San Bernardino and Riverside Counties spend the most time commuting and travel the farthest. Orange County continues to have the highest rate of HOV lane availability but the second lowest carpooling rate. San Bernardino County commuters perceive their freeway traffic to be worse than do commuters in other counties while Orange and Riverside County commuters perceive their surface street traffic to be worse than do commuters in other counties. Commuters in Imperial and Ventura counties are more satisfied with the commuter than their counterparts in other counties.

AT-HOME WORKERS

- Nearly one in ten full-time workers in the region (9.5%) work primarily at home. Over 80 percent of these at-home workers are self-employed, compared to only 12 percent of commuters.



1999 STATE OF THE COMMUTE CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS

Results of the 1999 State of the Commute study support the following major conclusions:

- Perceived traffic congestion on both freeways and surface streets deteriorated from 1998 to 1999. Commuters spent more time in commuting both to and from work in 1999 than in 1998. Significantly, for the first time since 1990, commuters were less satisfied with their commute.

- Many travel characteristics of regional commuters - including primary transportation modes, commute distance, work place arrival and departure times, parking, freeway and alternate route usage, the availability of a vehicle for getting to and from work, the need for a car during the work day, and park and ride lot usage - are consistent with findings from previous surveys.

- Drive-alone commuters continue to show greater interest in carpooling than in any other alternative travel mode.

- Awareness of most employer transportation programs continued to decline from 1998 to 1999 after a significant drop from 1996 to 1998. The decline in program awareness is likely to be a result of weakened regional marketing efforts due to previous substantial cuts in funding to the regional rideshare programs and elimination or scaling-down of employee trip reduction programs by employers, particularly at those sites with 100-249 employees, in response to air quality deregulation.

- However, employer-provided transportation information and services may influence an employee's commute mode choice. In general, of employees who have utilized transportation services offered by their employer, one in seven believes that these services influenced their choice of travel mode.

- There is no single transportation alternative which will address the needs and interests of all commuters. Findings from the State of the Commute continue to reveal that commuters differ in terms of their commute characteristics - trip distance, trip time, work site arrival and departure times - as well as their attitudes about traffic congestion, commute stress and satisfaction with the commute. In addition, factors which influence an individual's decision on how they travel to work vary considerably between individual commuters.

RECOMMENDATIONS

While the existing environment makes driving alone so attractive, data from the State of the Commute study continue to show that there is a group of commuters who can be adequately served by commute alternatives. To encourage and support the use of commute alternatives by these commuters, it is recommended that transportation planners, operators, policy makers and employers in this region implement the following actions: increase regional marketing efforts to sustain the existing carpool market share, develop and implement a regionwide rideshare marketing campaign, support efforts to expand and retain the regional HOV network, encourage voluntary-provided transportation information and services that promote ridesharing at work sites, and support efforts for research and development in the area of advanced travel information systems (ATIS) .

◆ *Increase Regional Marketing Efforts to Sustain the Existing Carpool Market Share*

The role of carpooling in Southern California is significant. Given the dispersed pattern of jobs and housing within the region, the length of the commute that many commuters daily endure, and their somewhat limited travel options, carpooling remains the most accessible alternative commute option available to regional commuters.

However, there are many factors that are making it more difficult to keep the existing carpool market share. Funding to the rideshare programs in this region has been cut significantly over the past several years. Air quality deregulation especially SB 432 has weakened regulatory support to rideshare programs at work sites. As a result, fewer commuters in the SCAG region are receiving RideGuides, carpooling with co-workers is declining, and employee's awareness of many employer transportation programs is down significantly.

It is very important to maintain the existing carpool market share since a one percent drop in the carpooling rate translates into more than 40,000 additional vehicles on our already crowded freeways and surface streets daily which in turn results in an annual increase of 302 million vehicle miles of travel.

In order to sustain the existing carpool market share, more resources are needed to strengthen rideshare programs in this region to promote voluntary ridesharing at work sites, market the extensive regional HOV network to regional commuters, and conduct marketing campaigns to increase commuter's awareness of available commute options.

◆ *Develop and Implement a Region-wide Rideshare Marketing Campaign*

Recognition of rideshare advertising or the 1-800-COMMUTE information number by regional commuters continues to decline. In addition, receipt of the RideGuide and carpooling with co-workers has steadily declined since 1994. This is significant since co-worker carpools are more likely than family/friend carpools to travel longer distances, travel on freeways and use HOV lanes. Unfortunately, there is currently no regional rideshare marketing campaign in place to reverse these trends.

Questions regarding the efficiency of HOV facilities ultimately come down to how effective HOV lanes are in reducing single-occupancy commuting. Currently, there are no programs to educate the public on how to utilize the HOV facilities or to inform them of the benefits.

As with any "product," ridesharing needs consistent, on-going exposure to its audience: the six million commuters in the greater Los Angeles area. The fact is, ridesharing is not a "one-time purchase." The average rideshare arrangement lasts two and half years. A significant number of commuters change their work location and/or residence in a two year period.

On-going advertising is vital to ensure that Southern California maintains its current ridesharing rate. It is also a highly effective way to increase the percentage of ridesharers.

◆ *Support Efforts to Expand and Retain the Regional HOV Network*

Findings from the State of the Commute study illustrate the important role HOV lanes play in encouraging drive-alone commuters to rideshare. About nine in ten HOV users reported that the HOV lane saved them time. Time savings ranks second only to convenience as a motivating factor in an individual's choice of travel mode. Nearly 40 percent of the survey respondents with no access to HOV lanes believe

that the availability of HOV lanes would personally encourage them to rideshare. As a result, HOV lanes may be one of the region's most powerful incentives to rideshare.

The HOV network is an integral part of the solutions prescribed by the 1998 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) to address traffic congestion and air pollution in this region. The RTP proposed more than $1 billion over the next two decades to expand the existing HOV network. Studies have shown that HOV lanes can have a significant impact on carpooling behavior among peak period commuters, and particularly on those able to take full advantage of the lane's travel time savings. Therefore, as the HOV network expands, support should be given to these new facilities as they open and to aggressively market and promote HOV lanes to the commuting population.

◆ *Encourage Voluntary Employer-Provided Transportation Information and Services that Promote Ridesharing at Work Sites*

Work sites continue to be a very important rideshare market because it is easier for employees at the same or nearby work site to form carpools or vanpools due to their similar origins and destinations, work hours, and regular commuting trips. Carpooling with co-workers is the second most common type of carpool formation (36%). Given the air quality deregulation, it is even more imperative to encourage voluntary employer-provided rideshare information and services at work sites so that existing ridesharers can get the rideshare assistance they need and potential ridesharers will have enough incentives to change their solo-driving habits. The marketing of ridesharing options at the work site should be considered as an essential part of any strategy aimed at sustaining current carpool market share and converting drive-alone commuters into ridesharers.

- ***Support Efforts for Research and Development in the Areas of Advanced Traveler Information Systems (ATIS)***

Millions of dollars have been spent to advise motorists of current traffic conditions after they have made the decision to drive alone and are already in their vehicles. By comparison, little has been spent to develop ATIS to reach travelers with information about alternatives before they have made a mode choice.

By utilizing state-of-the-art technologies (Internet, Intranet, electronic mail systems), updated traveler information could be transmitted directly to the individuals who most need the information each and every day: the commuter.

ABOUT THE STUDY

The core methodology for all nine State of the Commute Surveys has been the same. An outside marketing research firm drew a sample of commuters based on randomly selected telephone numbers for the region. The sample is designed to be representative of all commuters residing in the SCAG region who are 18 years or older and work outside the home at least 35 hours per week. Data are gathered through a 16-20 minute telephone survey between September and December. The timing for data collection has remained virtually the same for all nine surveys.

Data for the 1999 State of the Commute study was obtained through 2,925 completed telephone surveys. Starting in 1996, a larger sample size was obtained (historically about 2,500) due to the inclusion of Imperial County. A 1.8 percent sampling error is normally associated with sample sizes of 2,900. A 1.8 percent sampling error means that if this survey were conducted 100 times, one would be confident that 95 times out of 100 the characteristics of the sample would reflect the characteristics of the population within plus or minus 1.8 percent.

Interviewers were instructed to complete 525 interviews within Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino and Ventura counties and 300 interviews within Imperial County. Once all surveys had been completed, responses were weighted by the number of eligible respondents within the household. For analysis at the regional level, data was additionally weighted by the number of workers within each county based on the 1990 Census.

Data obtained from the 1999 State of the Commute Survey is compared with that of the previous surveys to uncover changes in behavior and attitudes. Information obtained from the 1999 State of the Commute study includes travel modes, work trip time and distance, arrival and departure times, stops made enroute, work schedules, full-time and part-time transportation alternatives, vehicle availability, parking costs, awareness of and participation in employer transportation programs, employer size, park and ride lot usage, and carpool characteristics. Demographic data gathered includes age, gender, race, ethnicity, occupation, years at the work site and residence, home and work counties, and household income.

The 1999 study also gathered information about various transportation issues, including:

- freeway usage
- use of and attitudes toward HOV lanes
- use of alternate routes
- availability of transit
- perceptions of traffic conditions and changes in those conditions over time
- availability of and participation in alternative work schedules and telecommuting
- commute satisfaction
- commute costs
- commute stress
- previous ridesharing experience
- commuter concerns
- willingness to try alternative travel options in the face of changing traffic conditions and reasons for unwillingness

- recognition of regional commuter assistance telephone number and personalized commute planner (RideGuide)

In addition, the 1999 study includes a brief new survey collecting demographic data of at-home workers in the region.

To request copies of the 1999 State of the Commute full report, write State of the Commute, Southern California Rideshare, 818 W. 7th Street, 12th floor, Los Angeles, CA 90017 or call (213) 236-1984. The report is also available for viewing and downloading on the Internet at:
http://www.scag.ca.gov/major/soc99.htm